



*Speech by Her Excellency*

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*President of the Republic of Mauritius*

*on “Global Challenges:*

*Providing Decent Jobs to All”*

*Overseas Development Institute*

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- *Excellencies*
- *Distinguished Guests,*
- *Ladies and Gentlemen,*

**As the Co-Chairperson of the ILO's Global Commission on the Future of Work, it is my privilege to be here today to address the particular challenges facing girls and women in the low-paid labour market globally.**

**Who are the women at the bottom of the labour market?**

**Well they work across the world, in rich and emerging economies, in urban and rural areas, for digital platforms, in homes, farms and factories, and in the informal and formal economies – they come from diverse backgrounds, and yet, they have major similarities when it comes to their daily lives and working conditions. Indeed, there remain stubbornly persistent gender differences in pay and in the types of jobs that men and women perform.**

**It is time to eliminate these gaps, and to do so by empowering women to choose more decent jobs.**

**Take, for example, the personal stories of four women that ILO colleagues have met in different parts of the world: Agata, Lidia, Valiamma, and Tanya.**

- ❖ Agata, 33, left Poland to work in Germany as a domestic worker. She works for several homes, caring for the elderly, and keeping households clean.**

**Her hours are unpredictable from week to week. She works mostly without contracts, and often at rates below the minimum wage. From her meagre salary, she supports her family back home, in the hopes of ensuring a more promising future for her children.**

- ❖ Lidia, 43, is an indigenous woman from Bolivia who has been working in the construction sector for three years.**

**At the beginning, she was employed through informal contractors, and was not paid.**

**So she began working for her own account.**

**Every morning, she gets up early, leaves her daughter at school, and meets with other women builders to offer their services.**

**❖ Valiamma, from India, works for eight to 10 hours a day, starting at 5am, making the trimming on t-shirts for a global brand.**

**She then takes care of her ailing husband and two children.**

**She is one of 40,000 homeworkers who are part of the supply chain in the garment manufacturing industry in Tirupur, a busy town in Tamil Nadu.**

**The t-shirts she is making will sell for at least a thousand times more than what she earns.**

**But home-based work is not solely present in developing countries. In the United States, the ILO met Tanya, a mother of two.**

**At the age of 42, she had to quit her job to stay home to care for her father.**

**She now works from home as a crowd worker, often earning the minimum wage.**

**These women live and work in vastly different contexts.**

**Yet *they all work for low pay* – most of the time, less than their male counterparts – and struggle to cope with the double burden of paid and unpaid labour required to care for their families.**

**These challenges transcend nationality, culture, GDP, and workplace.**

**Women, *Ladies and Gentlemen*, are over-represented among the low-paid in both developed and developing countries.**

**In Europe, for example, women make up on average 50–60% of workers in the three lowest pay deciles.**

**Women also suffer from a significant wage penalty throughout the world, ranging from 5 to 30%.**

**This pay gap is due at least in part to the over-representation of women in sectors where their work is**

**undervalued – domestic work and homebased work being two key examples.**

**80% of domestic workers are women, and only half of all domestic workers enjoy minimum wage protections equal to those enjoyed by other workers.**

**In crowd work, the gender wage gap is highest (25%) amongst those with the lowest earnings.**

*Ladies and Gentlemen:*

**Women are also more subject to part-time and temporary work.**

**Such jobs are on the rise, and have raised concerns about job quality in general, as they often guarantee only limited or no labour and social protections.**

**Part-time employment (fewer than 35 hours per week) is a widespread phenomenon among women in nearly all countries of the world, and their share of all those working part-time is 57%.**

**Women employees are also often over-represented in temporary, rather than in permanent jobs, ranging from over 20% in some European countries, to around 70% in India and parts of Africa.**

*Women are often overrepresented in informal employment, and especially in the most vulnerable forms of employment.*

**This is due, at least in part, to their lower access to education, training, economic assets, and other resources.**

**At least 60% of all women in employment are in the informal economy, where they are more often found in the most vulnerable situations, for instance as domestic workers or home-based workers, than their male counterparts.**

**The proportion of women contributing family workers, another form of vulnerable work, is more than three times higher among women in informal employment (28.1%) compared to men (8.7%).**

**It is in these types of jobs that decent work deficits are most pervasive – they thus face a double penalty, both as women and as informal workers.**

**Such deficits often imply a violation of human rights.**

**Indeed, it is important to note, many labour rights are human rights, for instance the right to rest, to social security, to equal pay, and to freedom of association.**

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

***Women are overrepresented in poor quality jobs in part due to their traditional roles as unpaid caregivers.***

**Everywhere in the world, women shoulder more of the care responsibilities.**

**These responsibilities shape their access to labour markets, and push them into accepting jobs that are more likely to allow them to conform to their traditional role as caregivers.**

**These tend to be informal, temporary, or with shorter hours, due to the flexibility that these kinds of jobs often afford.**

**For example, women are more likely to enter crowd work because it allows them to perform care duties at the same time.**

*Women at the bottom of the labour market may be particularly vulnerable to violence at work.*

**Women who work in private homes, either in their own as homeworkers, or in that of their employer in the case of domestic workers, work behind closed doors, and often out of reach of public authorities.**

**This can make them more vulnerable to violence at the hands of other household members.**

**Women who work in male dominated sectors, such as in construction, are also particularly vulnerable to violence.**

*Ladies and Gentlemen:*

***Underpinning these conditions is the widespread discrimination that women face in the labour market and beyond, as women, but also as members of already marginalized communities, such as indigenous peoples and migrants.***

**Female migrant workers are overrepresented in low skilled occupations, both in comparison with male migrants, and with native-born workers.**

**Discrimination pursues women throughout their professional lives, pushing them into jobs that are associated with women's work – such as domestic work – resulting in pronounced segregation into occupations that are undervalued.**

***Layered on top of the particular challenges of women in low-paid work worldwide is the reality of the effects of deep learning and Artificial Intelligence on the human labor force.***

**Technology is driving a skills gap, in which there are fewer and fewer jobs for unskilled or low-skilled workers everywhere in the world.**

**In conditions of equality, the empowerment of women workers – that is the capacity to choose what work they perform, and under what conditions they perform it – must be the future of work.**

*Ladies and Gentlemen:*

***Women workers can lead us there, but we must create an environment that enables and supports their empowerment.***

**How can this be achieved? While efforts will be required on many fronts, I would like to draw attention to four broad, overlapping approaches:**

- **gender responsive formalization policies;**
- **ensuring equality of treatment;**
- **affordable care policies; and the**
- **elimination of violence.**

*Women's economic empowerment must be achieved in conditions of decent work, and gender sensitive formalization policies are a key avenue to achieving this goal.*

**Formalization is about bringing people under the effective protection of the law and thus guaranteeing them access to rights.**

**At the political and institutional level, we must ensure that women are afforded labour and social protections equal to those enjoyed by workers generally.**

**Such strategies have included the extension of labour and social protections to female-dominated sectors that have historically been excluded, such as domestic work.**

**Extension of social protection can include eliminating or lowering thresholds on minimum hours, earnings or duration of employment so that workers in part-time and temporary employment are not excluded; or making systems more flexible with regards to contributions required to qualify for benefits.**

**Measures of these kinds also work to combat discrimination against migrants, indigenous peoples and other minorities.**

*Ladies and Gentlemen:*

***To combat discrimination, which affects all women workers, gender-specific measures can be taken to ensure equal protections that address the undervaluation of women's work.***

**These can include extension of minimum wages to female dominated sectors, extending duties on employers to promote gender equality, and ensuring equal treatment for part-time and temporary workers.**

***Providing access to affordable care options can also alleviate women from the double-burden of paid and unpaid work.***

**Provision of high-quality and affordable care facilitates women's access to formal employment, and would lift the constraints that cause women to choose lower quality jobs in exchange for the flexibility of staying at home.**

*The investment of the public and private sector in the innovation economy is also an essential element of raising workforce conditions and increasing economic and human welfare across society.*

**This is why I serve as Chair of the Coalition for African Research and Innovation, known as “CARI.” and the recently launched initiative at Davos called the Afrochampions initiative. These broad, pan-African organizations have been created by private and public stakeholders in recognition that our health and wellbeing are at the nexus of not just the interdependent, transdisciplinary nature of scientific research, but are part of a broader context, at the intersection of nutrition, health, agriculture, environment, governance and the economy.**

**These investments require sustained operational funding and capital support and the capacity to engage successfully with funders, governments, policy makers and communities.**

**This in turn will raise the value of work across society.**

*Creating an environment that enables women to realize their own empowerment also requires shifting discriminatory social norms, and ending violence against women.*

**Being subject to violence in its various forms, and even accepting it as a “norm”, shapes how women choose.**

**When they face domestic violence, it drives them to work in other people’s homes, often abroad, as domestic workers.**

**When they face violence at work, it drives them to accept substandard working conditions.**

**And the constant exposure to violence and harassment drives women to accept that such violence as normal, eroding their self-esteem and the belief that they have the right to better work, and a better life.**

**The pervasiveness of this threat, which is based on widespread gender discrimination, has instigated the process to adopt a new ILO standard on violence against women and men in the world of work.**

*Ladies and Gentlemen:*

**I would like to conclude by underscoring that women's empowerment should be synonymous with women being enabled to represent their own interests, and to express their own preferences.**

**Without this capacity, it would be very difficult to speak meaningfully of empowerment, because the fate of women would be determined by others.**

**For this reason, the right of women to have a voice, to be their own representatives, and to gain bargaining power, lie at the heart of the opportunity for women to seize their own destinies – not least of all for those women working at the bottom of the labour market.**

**I thank you for your attention.**